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STRIPED MULLET AND THEIR PREPARATION FOR THE TABLE

Prepared in the Division of Commercial Fisheries

Most abundant in the markets from April through November, the mullet is one of the most important food fishes of the South Atlantic and Gulf States. Although widely distributed in warmer waters throughout the world, its most significant range commercially for this country is off the coasts of Florida, Alabama, and North Carolina, in that order. Louisiana and Texas, too, however, are known to have vast, undeveloped fisheries for this species.

Mullet run in schools, frequently swimming at the surface, where their noise and movement betray their presence to fishermen; thus, night, as well as day-fishing for mullet, is customary. Certain species, the striped mullet at least, have the habit of leaping from the water for as much as three feet above the surface. This has given rise to their common name, jumping mullet. This variety composes almost the entire commercial production.

Mullet are generally marketed whole, fresh or frozen, although they are sometimes sold eviscerated. Other market forms include fresh fillets, salted fish and roe. Market sizes range from half-pounders (best broiled) to 5-pound fish suitable for baking. The dusky-colored flesh is firm, and contains a delicately flavored, nutritious, and highly-palatable oil.

Here are seven new laboratory-tested recipes for this old-time favorite fish of the South. Each recipe is standardized to serve six average portions.

RECIPES

Fried Mullet

2 pounds mullet fillets
1/2 cup flour
1 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon pepper
3 tablespoons fat

Roll the fillets in the combined flour, salt, and pepper mixture. Melt the fat in a frying pan, and fry the fillets on each side for 8 minutes or until done.

Spiced Fried Mullet

2 pounds mullet fillets, skinned
2 teaspoons salt
1/4 teaspoon pepper
1/4 teaspoon thyme
1/2 teaspoon tarragon
1 bay leaf, crumbled
1/4 cup onion, finely diced
1/3 cup vinegar
1/3 cup vegetable oil
1/2 cup flour
3 tablespoons vegetable shortening

Wipe fillets with a damp cloth and cut in serving-sized portions. Mix all the seasonings, onion, vinegar, and oil together, and marinate fish fillets for one hour in this mixture. Drain, dry slightly, and roll in flour. Melt vegetable shortening in a skillet and fry for about 10 minutes, turning when half done. Cook until fillets are a golden brown and are cooked through.

Royal Broiled Mullet

2 pounds mullet fillets
1 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon pepper
3 tablespoons vegetable shortening
Paprika

Season fillets with salt and pepper, and place skin-side down on the bottom of a greased, broiler pan. Dot the top of the fillets with the shortening and sprinkle with the paprika. Broil in a pre-heated broiler 2 inches from the heat for about 10 minutes or until done.

Baked Stuffed Mullet

3 pounds mullet, dressed for baking
2 slices of bacon

Stuffing

4 cups dry bread crumbs
3 tablespoons onion finely chopped
3/4 cup celery finely cut or
1/2 teaspoon celery salt
2 slices bacon
4 tablespoons vegetable shortening
3/4 teaspoon salt
1/8 teaspoon pepper
1 teaspoon sage

Chop two slices of the bacon very fine, and saute with the celery and onion for a few minutes in the vegetable shortening until the onion and celery are soft. Add the other ingredients and mix well.

Wipe the dressed fish with a damp cloth and salt lightly inside and out. Stuff the fish and sew or tie with string to retain stuffing. Cut four slits, about 2 inches long, across the top of the fish. Lay the remaining two slices of bacon across these slits. Place in a pre-heated oven of 375° F. (moderate oven) and bake for one hour.

Mullet Fillets Baked in Mock Hollandaise Sauce

2 pounds mullet fillets
1-1/4 teaspoons salt

Mock Hollandaise Sauce

2 tablespoons butter or fortified margarine, melted
4-1/2 tablespoons vegetable shortening, melted
4-1/2 tablespoons flour
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/8 teaspoon pepper
1-1/2 cups milk
3 egg yolks, well beaten
1-1/2 tablespoons lemon juice
Paprika

Wipe the fillets with a damp cloth and place one layer deep in a shallow, greased baking pan. Sprinkle the fish with 1-1/4 teaspoons salt. Mix the melted butter and melted vegetable shortening together, and measure 4-1/2 tablespoons into a skillet. Blend in the flour, salt, and pepper and gradually add the milk. Cook until thick, stirring constantly. Remove from the fire and gradually add the well-beaten egg yolks. Mix well. Add 1 tablespoon of the combined melted butter and vegetable shortening, and stir well. Add 1/2 of the lemon juice and beat well. Add 1 tablespoon of the mixed melted butter and vegetable shortening and stir. Add the rest of the lemon juice and mix. Spread the fish with the sauce and sprinkle with paprika. Bake for 45 minutes at 325° F. (moderately slow oven).

Baked Coated Mullet

2 pounds mullet fillets
1-1/2 teaspoons salt
1/8 teaspoon pepper
3 tablespoons vegetable shortening, melted
2 teaspoons grated onion
1/2 teaspoon grated lemon rind
1 bay leaf, crumbled
1 tablespoon fine bread crumbs

Wipe fillets with a damp cloth and lay skin-side down, one layer deep, in a shallow, greased baking pan. Sprinkle fish with salt and pepper. Combine the melted shortening, onion, lemon rind, and bay leaf and simmer for two minutes. Pour over fillets and top with bread crumbs. Bake 375° F. (moderate oven) for 30 minutes.

Mullet Head Chowder

3 mullet heads
2-1/2 cups water
2 sprigs parsley
1 stalk celery (leaves and stalk), cut fine
1-1/3 tablespoons salt
2 slices bacon, diced
1 small onion, sliced
1/2 cup canned mushrooms, drained
2 cups raw potatoes, cubed
2 tablespoons butter or fortified margarine
2 tablespoons flour
1/8 teaspoon pepper
3 cups milk

Remove gills and wash mullet heads thoroughly. Place mullet heads, water, parsley, celery, and 1 tablespoon of the salt together in a covered pan and simmer for 15 minutes. Strain, saving the stock. Saute the bacon, onions, and mushrooms together until bacon is crisp and onions are lightly brown and soft. In the meantime, boil the potatoes in the stock until they are tender, and add to the bacon, onion, and mushrooms. Melt the butter or fortified margarine, blend in the flour, the pepper, and the rest of the salt, and gradually add the milk. Cook until slightly thick, stirring constantly. Combine the milk mixture with the bacon, onion, mushroom, potato and stock mixture and bring to a boil. Serve hot.

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